DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 106 267 95 SP 009 176

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TITLE Florida's Teacher Education Centers: A New State Policy for Teacher Education.
INSTITUTION Florida Univ., Gainesville. Coll. of Education.
SPONS AGENCY Florida State Dept. of Education, Tallahassee.; Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 20 May 75
GRANT OEG-0-74-2991
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Coordination; Educational Legislation; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Interinstitutional Cooperation; State Aid; *State Legislation; *Teacher Centers; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Florida

ABSTRACT

The Teacher Education Center Act of 1973 both established a mechanism for the development of a statewide system of teacher education centers and sponsored a new form of institutional cooperation designed to give new shape and meaning to teacher education in Florida. The new state policy for teacher education will be fully realized when teachers, administrators, and university faculty learn to cooperate with one another on an equal basis. Ten centers, approved by the State Council for Teacher Education Centers, are now in their first year of operation. Administrative and planning work is carried out by the director, staff, and teacher center council. Training work can be conducted by university personnel, classroom teachers, school district personnel, or community members with special expertise. Most center activity is scheduled during the teacher's normal workday. Teacher education centers were provided with funds from both the state department of education and the state university system. Following are some of the common problems which teacher education centers faced in their first year of operation: (a) deadlines and directives, (b) partnership problems, (c) organizational strain, (d) reward systems, (e) building grass roots support, and (f) external events. (PB)

ED106267

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FLORIDA'S TEACHER EDUCATION CENTERS:

A NEW STATE POLICY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Research & Documentation Project

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May 20, 1975

Research for this work supported by Florida Department of Education Grant No. 750-117 and United States Office of Education Grant No. OEG-0-74-2991.

SP 009 176

FLORIDA'S TEACHER EDUCATION CENTERS:

A NEW STATE POLICY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education centers are now a matter of law in Florida. The Teacher Education Center Act of 1973 both established a mechanism for the development of a state-wide system of teacher education centers and sponsored a new form of institutional cooperation designed to give new shape and meaning to teacher education in Florida. The following passages from the Act illustrate the intent and scope of the legislation:

> -The purposes of this act are to declare a new state policy for the education of teachers...
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> -The most important influence the school can contribute to the learning of any student is the attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding of the teacher.
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> -Teachers can best assist with improving education when they participate in identifying needed changes and in designing, developing, implementing and evaluating solutions to meet the identified needs.

-The education of teachers is inherently a career long process.

-Effective July 1, 1973, the responsibility for operating programs for preservice and inservice teacher education is assigned jointly to the colleges and universities, to the district school boards, and to the teaching profession....

-In order to facilitate collaboration between colleges and universities and school districts, ensure appropriate involvement and participation of teachers, and establish procedures for joint utilization of resources available for preservice and inservice teachers, the State Board of Education shall issue regulations for the establishment of teacher education centers in school districts.

The language of this Act gains life through the new responsibilities assumed by teachers, school district administrators and university personnel. Making teacher education a partnership operation is more easily accomplished in legal terms than in actual practice. But the new policy is necessary, although not sufficient, for bringing about a needed change in the conduct of teacher education.

Fulfillment of this act will require teachers to assume more initiative and responsibility in their professional training, although this will seem unfamiliar to them. School district administrators will have to abandon their traditional duty of "giving" inservice education to teachers whether it meets teacher needs or not. University personnel, likewise, face their responsibility of attending to teachers and administrators as equal partners in an enterprise which up to now has been owned and operated by the university alone. Florida's new state policy for teacher education will be fully realized when teachers, administrators, and university faculty learn to cooperate with one another on an equal basis. In the end, the form of teacher education centers established in Florida may probe to be an experiment in a very old idea, democracy.

In brief, teacher education centers were established by the legislature to be a cooperative venture among local school districts, colleges of education and professional organizations to collaboratively determine the training needs of teachers, plan training activities, and deliver services that are responsive to teacher needs. In Florida, teacher education centers are not buildings or specific places where teachers meet for training. In that sense, the term center is misleading. Rather, they are a coordinating service in which different interest groups participate in decision-making about the education of teachers.

After the enabling legislation was passed, the implementation of teacher centers at the local level followed a regular pattern. Initially, the State Department of Education sent information about the Teacher Education Center Act to all county school districts in Florida. Those districts interested in starting a center were asked to file a letter of intent with the State Council for Teacher Education Centers.* From those letters several districts were asked to develop a full proposal for the starting of a center in their county. The State Council approved ten of these proposals.

The ten centers are now in their first year of operation, the 1974-75 school year. They were intentionally spread geographically across the

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* The State Council for Teacher Education Centers is a committee appointed by the Governor with representatives from the teaching profession, public and private colleges of education, and local school districts, and charged with developing guidelines and policy for the implementation of a statewide system of teacher education centers.

state. Of the first ten centers, seven serve one county school district each, and three are multi-county centers serving three to eight counties each. Together the ten centers provide inservice training for twenty-four of Florida's sixty-seven counties.** In these counties, they serve 14,614 of the state's 76,366 teachers. Possibly, five more centers will open next year. What do such centers look like?

If you were to visit one of Florida's teacher centers, you would probably find yourself in the administration office of a county school system. (There are three exceptions.) In most cases, you would first meet a secretary assigned to the center with a stack of messages and a mass of paper work. Behind the secretary there would be empty offices, with the director and the staff (if there is one) in the field. You would not find a group of teachers, but traces of those who manage the coordinating activity of inservice education.

The administrative and planning work of the center is done by its director, staff, and the teacher center council. The center council is made up of representatives from the local school district, classroom teachers, colleges of education, and community agencies, with the majority of the members being classroom teachers as prescribed by law. Each center council is charged with four major responsibilities:

-Recommend policy and procedures for the teacher education center

-Develop goals and objectives for the center within the policies as determined by the local school board.

-Recommend the employment of an appropriate teacher education center staff.

** Although the law allows involvement in inservice and preservice teacher education, most centers are more involved with inservice training.

-Make recommendations on an appropriate budget.

The center director and staff administer center policy and programs adopted by the council. The director is usually appointed by the school board on the recommendation of the council. He and his staff also serve as information sources for the council and work closely with the council as liaison with the local school district and the cooperating teacher training institution(s).

The training work done through a teacher education center can be conducted by university personnel, classroom teachers, school district personnel, or community members with special expertise. Once a training need is determined by the center council, training resources are sought and contracts with training personnel are made. Teachers who have expressed interest in the training program are then contacted and the center activity is scheduled. Most center activity is scheduled during the normal work-day of teachers. Sometimes the activity is short enough to be done during planning hours; other times the activity is scheduled for a professional day or a day set aside especially for inservice work. The training activities can vary in length from an hour to a sustained program lasting the entire school year. In some centers, the training activity is scheduled on regular instructional days, in which case center funds are used to provide substitutes for those teachers attending training programs.

During their first year of operation, there were financial incentives for starting a teacher education center. In addition to the normally allocated budget for inservice education given to each county in Florida,

teacher education centers received a $20,000 grant from the State Department of Education and a grant equivalent from two to four full-time faculty positions from the State University System. The $20,000 was designated as start-up funds to be used for the purchase of teacher training materials and the development of research designed to determine teacher training needs and evaluate programs offered through the center. Faculty positions were granted to centers in cooperation with nearby regional state universities. With each position valued at $15,000 per school year, a center could be granted from $30,000 to $60,000 worth of additional services. In some counties starting a teacher education center doubled the existing inservice budget; in others with larger inservice budgets, starting a center was not a significant financial advantage.

In their first year of operation teacher education centers faced some common problems:

-Deadlines and directives: Most centers reported that the joint planning required by a partnership arrangement was hindered by state adopted deadlines and that clear directives were needed from the state level.

-Partnership problems: Teacher centers require working together in new ways and sharing power when it has in the past been more centralized. Learning to be partners in developing training programs and delivering those programs has caused some problems.

-Organizational strain: School district and university norms are strained when decision-making is shared. Personnel in those systems are having to learn new ways of relating to one another.

-Reward systems: School district administrators are rewarded for not "rocking the boat." University faculty are rewarded basically for research and scholarship. Participation in teacher centers may cause behavior which falls outside of the traditional reward systems.

-Building grass roots support: Teacher centers will not last without the support of classroom teachers. Building teacher support has been an important concern in the first year of center operation.

-External events: A depressed economy has drained state revenues and caused cut-backs in funding to county districts. Growing teacher power has caused some counties to back away from teacher centers.

Through the enabling legislation, teacher centers are now taking their first steps. To date the legislation has paved the way for ten teacher centers and has helped alter the traditional conception of inservice teacher education by facilitating new forms of cooperation among teacher training institutions, local school districts, and teacher organizations. Traditionally, inservice teacher education came from the university down to teachers in local school districts. Now, by law, it is a partnership arrangement. This arrangement carries with it demands for new styles of working together among institutions which in the past have operated independently of each other. Social scientists have long told us that new social arrangements cause new behaviors to emerge in those individuals participating in such arrangements. Thus teacher education centers in Florida have become a catalyst for change.

State legislatures are not usually thought of as educational change agents, particularly in a positive sense. In this case, a state legislature has sponsored the development of new, cooperative arrangements for the education of teachers; arrangements which have the potential for transforming the current condition of inservice teacher education into a more responsive form of continuing professional renewal.